

Mario Artist: Talent Studio (import)

You won't find this game outside Japan -- but how good is the 64DD's most popular title really?

by Peer Schneider — (MARIO 64) 64DD

June 30, 2000 - The second in a proposed four-part series of Mario Artist 64DD creativity apps, Talent Studio is one of the few titles that actually warrant the purchase of the ill-fated disk drive add-on. I have to use the word "title" because, well, Talent Studio isn't really a game. The idea behind this quirky timewaster is to create "talents," personalities that perform on screen and dance, pose or make you laugh with their antics. If you've seen some of the stuff we've done with this program here at the IGN

offices, then you already know that Talent Studio can be amazingly funny. Seeing your or your friend's face mapped onto a superdeformed character and dancing a limbo dance wearing a chicken suit has never failed to crack a smile. As a matter of fact, Talent Studio proved to be a real people magnet in our office. Every time we brought up a new character and had him or her do stuff on screen, the IGN84 corner was packed with people shaking their heads and laughing at the unusual sight.

Talent Studio offers three different modes:

- **Create a Talent:** Design a character from scratch, including body style, size, face, hair, clothes, bio, voice and more.
- **Make a Movie:** Use a simple movie making tool to create your own little film starring up to three different characters you made. Determine camera angles, animations, props, backgrounds, special effects, music and more.
- **Fashion/Movie Show Viewer:** Watch your virtual models strut their stuff in a Nintendo Fashion Show, or enjoy one of your movie creations in a virtual cinema.

So how does your face get into the 64DD? Mario Artist comes bundled with a Capture Cartridge, a device with RCA audio and video inputs as well as a mic input for the Nintendo microphone (the one bundled with Hey You, Pikachu!). To capture an image, you connect a video camera, a VCR or a TV to the capture cartridge and access the face creation menu. You can now see the footage from your video device played back in black and white on your screen (once you capture it, the picture will be in color). Hit a button and the 64DD captures the image, whether it's your mug, the face of a celebrity or a baboon's butt. If the image is satisfactory, you move on to a cropping screen where you tell the program how wide the actual face is, where the hairline and chin start and where the nose and eyes are. The image is then cropped and mapped onto a polygonal head. Next, you can determine the overall skin color (so that the body color matches the face), apply make-up and clean up the face texture a bit, and finally customize the head and nose shapes to match the real thing. Game Boy fans can also import images from the Game Boy Camera, but the quality is of course not as nice as the video capture stuff.

This is where the real fun begins. From a series of wonderfully simple menus, you can adjust your creation's gender, body size and style, width, "buntness," curves, hair style and ears. We're particularly thankful for the latter option, as it allowed us to faithfully recreate Aaron Boulding's Vulcan ears. Using the microphone, you can also give your character a catch phrase & a word or short sentence that your virtual buddy will occasionally say while you're busy customizing. It's kind of creepy... After this is done, you move on to the clothes. There is so much variety here, it's easy to get carried away. You can choose from different types of underwear, hats, pants, socks, shoes, gloves, shirts, jackets, dresses, accessories and more. The selections range from standard stuff like jeans and boxing gloves to completely whacked out space alien outfits, tree hats, fairy wings, turtle shells, antennae and even the Dan Egger monster suit. But that's not all. Each accessory can also be customized in color and even be assigned a pattern. So if you really want a tartan chicken suit & it's all yours. If you own Mario Artist Paint Studio, you can even design patterns and stamps in that program and load it into Talent Studio. That way, you can create text or logos and map them on your creation's t-shirt, hat or jacket. Speaking of stamps, you can also use pre-made eyes, noses, mouths, eyebrows and other stuff to alter your star's face and turn him or her into an anime character. You can also assign your creation a name, a birth date and even a



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complete bio and then save everything to disk.

As you can see, the combinations are limitless -- but what exactly do you do with your character after you're done creating? You have three choices. You can either enjoy a fashion show that has your character (and others located in the same save box as your creation) walk down a runway and present his or her duds, or you can move on to watch dozens of pre-made animation clips starring your hero. These clips range from disco dancing to battling with a stubborn umbrella in a thunder storm. These motion-captured animations are all a hoot to watch, especially because the program deforms your talent's polygon head to simulate facial expressions.

But the real attraction in Talent Studio is the movie maker mode. Here, you can edit together a simple movie using pre-made animation routines, determine the camera moves, backgrounds, props, special effects, music, subtitles and so on. It's all a bit limited -- you can only use a maximum of three characters and they can never be on screen at the same time, but there is still a lot of room for creativity.

Closing Comments

Mario Artist: Talent Studio is one of the more interesting titles for the N64, but it definitely needs an audience to be appreciated. There is no denying that creating a caricature of a real person and messing around with all the options is great fun, but unless you've got people to show your homunculus to, it does get old after awhile. Sure, you can upload your creation to Nintendo's Randnet online service in Japan, but there's nothing like filling your house with laughter by having your virtual dad do a limbo dance.

The most impressive thing about Talent Studio is how intuitive the menu design is. With the exception of the movie maker tools, virtually everything is self-explanatory and easily accessible even to people who can't read Japanese. Still, as fun as this title is, it doesn't lend itself to importing for one simple reason: it's on the 64DD. Sadly, it's currently also the only DD title good enough to warrant purchase of the outdated add-on. But do you really want to shell out \$500 bucks or more for the DD and Talent Studio (if you can find them) to play virtual Frankenstein? The Mario Artist apps can be great fun, but unless Nintendo finds a better way to make them accessible to its gaming audience, they will be forever doomed to obscurity. Great ideas and good execution -- wrong format.

IGN Ratings for Mario Artist: Talent Studio (64DD)

Rating

Game (or box)

IGN DEMO ROOM

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8.0

Presentation
The "Nintendo touch" makes for intuitive menus and quirky presentation. Very unique.

7.0

Graphics
Realistic, motion-captured animations and detailed characters. Nothing mind-blowing, but everything looks solid.

7.0

Sound
The DD continues to impress with high-quality soundtracks. There isn't much in the way of sound effects, but the music is downright funky.

8.0

Gameplay
Who would have thought playing with virtual dolls could be this much fun? Very addicting, although I would have liked to see more interactive components, like some real mini-games.

8.0

Lasting Appeal
The joy of creation can get old once you've created all your friends and enemies & if you don't have anyone to show your talents to.

8.2

OVERALL
(out of 10 / not an average)

impressive

¹ <http://ign64.ign.com/articles/160/160085p1.html>